



INMATES CUTTING UP – California State Prison inmates waiting to get their carpentry or welding certificates share a light moment during the graduation ceremony held in the Prison Industry Authority's 30,000 square foot modular building factory/training center on Nov. 28.

Village Life photo by Mike Roberts

Recidivism rate of last year graduates at 16 percent Prison Industry Authority producing results

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The promise of a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation program that delivers

everything the troubled department's name implies hung in the chilly air of the cavernous 30,000 square foot hanger where Folsom inmates learn real-world construction skills as part of the Prison Industry Authority's

pre-carpentry apprenticeship program.

Years of overcrowding, increased inmate violence, record recidivism rates and a sputtering start to the Governor's six-month-old \$7.9 bil-

lion prison reform package have left California prison officials hungry for some good news.

Last week they got it. On

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VILLAGE LIFE ■ DECEMBER 5, 2007

PRISON GRADS

Wednesday, Nov. 28, inmate families, guards, instructors and prison officials gathered to celebrate a graduation of sorts. The Prison Industry Authority awarded certificates of completion to another 33 inmates from the carpentry and welding certification programs in Folsom.

Tosha Roach sat excitedly in the front row, hands pressed together in a prayer-like anticipation as she waited for her brother Joey to step up and receive his ticket to a new life outside prison walls—a carpentry training certificate.

When Joey Roach's name was finally called, Tosha Roach could no longer contain herself. With bemused guards and officials looking on, she fist pumped and squealed with gospel zeal before bolting to the stage to hug her brother.

From the podium, Prison Industry Authority General Manager Chuck Pattillo announced that only 16-percent of last year's paroled pre-carpentry graduates have returned to prison thus far. He cautioned that it's too early to post that as a final program statistic, but with the general prison population still suffering a 70-percent recidivism rate, the early results are a beacon of hope in an overcrowded system which desperately needs to find a way to stop the revolving door that inmates call "doing life on the installment program."

Tosha Roach understands that this is an opportunity for her brother to break the cycle. After the ceremony she described the changes she's seen in him. "Before, I think he saw prison as a legitimate alternative for someone like him," she said.

But his attitude changed as he learned a viable trade. "I've watched him turn from a boy to a man; from being irresponsible, not really caring about himself or his life, to caring for his family and his future," she said. "He's determined not to come back here this time."

Joey Roach is 31 years old, and like many Folsom prisoners has spent most

of his adult life in prison. He began his most recent sentence in July, 2005.

"I was busted for transportation of methamphetamine this last time," he said, biting his lower lip. Almost apologetically, he added: "My job at the Del Taco drive through didn't pay enough, so I went back to what I know and tried to make a little money on the side."

Roach knows that when he's released in September 2008 he'll have more tangible and profitable options.

Program growth
From the podium, Pattillo told his graduates that if just five of the 33 don't return to prison, his program pays for itself. "We have one goal," he said, "that is that we don't want to see you again."

Pattillo also announced that a carpenter's training program at the California Institution for Women in Corona recently graduated its first class, and that the program is being expanded to two women's prisons in the San Joaquin Valley with funds from Governor Schwarzenegger's prison reform bill, AB900.

Pattillo wants to see programs like this in prisons across the state.

Last month, the PIA reached an agreement with the Iron Workers Union that will establish a similar pre-apprenticeship program to prepare inmates for careers as ironworkers when they are paroled.

"Increasingly, the PIA is becoming the focus for rehabilitation within the department," said Folsom State Prison Warden Matthew Kramer after the ceremony on Wednesday. "That's because there's a connection between what an inmate does in here and what they will find when they walk out the door."

The pre-apprenticeship program is operated in partnership with the carpenter's union, which provides instructors to train inmates in real-world job skills they'll need on the construction site. In areas where the union is active, inmates are assigned to work sites when they are paroled. The PIA provides each inmate with a tool belt and

pays their union dues for the first year.

Lawon Washington, a 15-month veteran of the program, picked up his carpentry certificate, but he's already moved on to electrical work.

Washington said he's also learning how to be a better person while he learns a trade. "I'm getting the skills but I'm also learning how to work with people," he said.

He plans to return to Bakersfield and get in touch with the union. The southern California Carpenter's Union is not currently part of the program, so he won't be "placed" into a job like he would in Northern California.

Nonetheless, "Opportunity is here and ready for us," he said. "If I don't take advantage of this I could easily end up back here."

After the ceremony, with guards watching carefully, inmates mingled with family and introduced their instructors. Instructor Anthony Gillis posed for a photo with inmate Howard Kirkland's family. He shook another student's hand and said "I'm glad you got yours."

Gillis told Life Newspapers that the instructors do more than just teach construction skills. "We give our students encouragement to finish the program," he said. "We talk real talk to them."

Inmates must get a high school degree or pass a GED test to graduate from the program.

Pete and Sondra Beltramo sat on the hard folding chairs in the cold warehouse and watched their son Kenny take his carpentry certificate. Afterward, Beltramo said he hopes to join the laborer's union back home in Chico when he gets out.

"We're hooked up with work when we first get out," he said. "We go right to the top of the union list, rather than having to go out there and look for work and get turned down for being a felon. It gives you something to work for. It's a big step up for a guy like me."

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Village Life photo by Mike Roberts

HAPPY SISTER – Tosha Roach tries to contain herself as her brother Joey Roach receives his carpentry certificate during the ceremony at the Prison Industry Authority in Folsom on Nov. 28.



Village Life photo by Mike Roberts

A BIG STEP UP – Inmate Kenny Beltramo poses with his parents Pete and Sondra after receiving his carpentry certificate from the Prison Industry Authority and the Northern California Carpenter's Union Local 46. When he returns home to Chico with his certificate, Beltramo is automatically qualified for a union apprenticeship, "instead of having to go out there and look for work and get turned down for being a felon," he said "It's a big step up for a guy like me."